

# Youth Secretariat Report

2003: A Year in Review

## ►►► Message from the Chair



Welcome to the second and final edition of the Youth Secretariat Report - 2003: A Year in Review. This report provides an overview of key accomplishments, partnerships and collaborations of the Youth Secretariat in the past year, and outlines new and ongoing priorities related to youth in Alberta for the coming year.

As Chair of the Youth Secretariat, I am involved in the concerns of youth across Alberta and, through my work and recent consultations with youth across the province, I am becoming more and more aware of the variety of challenges faced by young people as they meet the developmental stages of adolescence and progress into adulthood.

Some of the key issues for youth right now include: bullying, family breakups, domestic violence, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and mentoring. It is encouraging, however, to know that FASD is 100% preventable and mentoring is 100% successful. Though there is a great deal to accomplish in addressing these important issues, there is also a great deal to look forward to and be excited about as we forge ahead, through partnership and consultation, with a number of promising initiatives that are headed in the right direction.

With the strong support and direction of Honourable Iris Evans, Minister of Children's Services, the Youth Secretariat has been able to effectively contribute to some of the major concerns of youth at risk and youth in transition over the past year. These include the Youth in Transition Policy Framework, the development of the Advancing Futures Bursary Program for Youth in Government Care, and the development of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* and the *Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act*, both targeted for proclamation in 2004. This is very good news for our young people across the province, looking to us for guidance and assistance, in this critical stage of their lives.

I am proud of the work that has been accomplished for youth in Alberta over the past year, but, as we look forward to the year ahead and the exciting initiatives in store, it is important to remember that there continues to remain a number of vulnerable and at-risk youth in Alberta. I am eager and committed to continuing our work of identifying key issues for youth, building upon existing initiatives and partnerships, and most importantly, ensuring promising and secure futures for all young people in our province.

Mary Anne Jablonski  
MLA, Red Deer North ▲

## ► Legislation Development

The Youth Secretariat has played an important role in the consultation and review process of some exciting legislation developments pertaining to youth over the past year. They include the following:

### *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*

Considerable work is underway to prepare for implementing the new *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* which will replace the current *Child Welfare Act*, with proclamation being targeted for 2004. A positive and significant change to the legislation is the inclusion of a section pertaining specifically to youth in transition, describing the requirement that all youth in the care of the ministry must have a formal transitional plan for independence. This requirement, and the key elements of a plan, will be further highlighted and guided in policy and regulations. The draft policy and regulations that have been developed thus far include input and recommendations from numerous ministry and non-ministry stakeholders, including youth in care and youth formerly in care.

### *Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act*

The Advisory Committee on Transition for Youth with Disabilities, co-chaired by the Youth Secretariat, has completed its reports and recommendations for consideration in developing the *Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act*. The Act will focus on abilities rather than disabilities, early intervention and family supports. It will ensure that children and youth will have a healthy start in life and the supports they need to reach their potential. The recommendations examine:

- issues regarding planning for better coordination of policies and services to meet the transitional needs of families with youth with disabilities.
- proposed inter-ministerial initiatives providing recommendations on appropriate strategies that meet the needs of youth with disabilities experiencing transitional issues; and
- cross-ministry effective practices for the provision of transitional supports for youth with disabilities and their families.

The proclamation of the *Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act* is targeted for 2004. ▲



# Collaboration For Youth

*The Youth Secretariat has been engaged in a number of initiatives focusing on youth issues with key internal and external stakeholders. The Alberta Child and Youth Initiative (ACYI) - a collaborative partnership of government ministries who work on issues affecting children and youth - has played a key role in furthering a number of important youth initiatives over the past year. Below are two of ACYI's current priority areas:*

## Youth in Transition

Young people face significant challenges in their transitions to adulthood, perhaps more so today than at any time in the past. The timeframe in which this transition takes place is now longer than it has ever been, beginning earlier and lasting longer than it did even a generation ago. Some youth face the challenge of transition to adulthood without appropriate family and support networks, educational and employment opportunities, or even adequate food, clothing and shelter. Aboriginal and immigrant youth, young people with special needs and disabilities, young parents, and youth with child welfare involvement, face a variety of challenges that complicate their transitions to adulthood.

The ACYI Youth in Transition Policy Framework was designed to guide and provide consistency in the development of government policies, strategies and funding allocations that support youth in transition. As a follow-up to the development of the ACYI Youth in Transition Policy Framework, a cross-ministerial policy review assessed current government policies and their alignment with the framework. The key findings and recommendations of this review are grouped into three areas:

- ■ ■ **Integration and Coordination** - to ensure that provincial supports for youth in transition are comprehensive, integrated, and effective in meeting youths' needs.
- ■ ■ **Learning and Skill Development** - to engage and support youth in continuing or resuming their education and training, both within the basic and post-secondary systems.
- ■ ■ **Basic Needs** - to explore the ability and responsibility of government to provide financial and social supports to a unique and distinct population of 16 and 17-year-olds who are not in need of protective services but have no other form of support. ▲

## Mentoring

The Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP), strongly supported by the Ministry of Children's Services, was created in response to community interest in a provincewide mentoring movement that would see Albertans working together to expand mentoring opportunities for children and youth, especially in diverse communities. Members come from all across the province and represent agencies, cultural communities, aboriginal communities, and all levels of government. Following are some of the recent highlights:

- ■ ■ The establishment of a database that will provide information to Albertans about mentoring opportunities and services, and will track the number of mentors and the number of children and youth being mentored in Alberta.
- ■ ■ AMP piloted a public awareness/recruitment campaign - Mentoring Works - in Edmonton and area, that was supported with funding and staff time by the Ministry of Children's Services, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and area, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) and Alberta Mental Health. To date, 306 new mentors have been recruited in the Edmonton area by Mentoring Works, and Calgary and Medicine Hat use Mentoring Works materials in local public awareness campaigns.
- ■ ■ Youth in Transition Mentoring Pilots are being implemented in Edmonton and Medicine Hat, to provide mentoring supports to youth with child welfare or young offender status to help their reintegration into the community. This program is currently being expanded in Calgary, where the Calgary Young Offender Centre will facilitate connections with community mentoring supports when youth return to their home communities.
- ■ ■ In an effort to enhance transitional supports to help youth leaving child welfare become independent, and to increase diversity of mentoring options for high risk youth by 15%, Alberta Children's Services, partnering ministries, Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs), the Children's Advocate, and community partners are developing a plan for the establishment of an Aboriginal Mentoring Pilot Project. The goals of the pilot projects are to increase the number of mentors and youth at risk receiving mentors, and document effective mentoring practices for Aboriginal youth. The projects will take place at four different sites - two urban and two on reserve. Representatives from the sites will form an advisory committee to guide the projects with support and resources from project partners. ▲



# Consulting, Supporting & Involving Youth

*The Youth Secretariat has been engaged in a number of initiatives focusing on youth, and has partnered in a number of new ways to obtain youth input into ministry directions. They include the following:*

## ▲ Youth Advisory Panel

The Youth Advisory Panel (YAP), formed in June 2000, is a group of 12 youth who were selected from across Alberta. The panel meets six times annually to provide feedback on proposed recommendations and findings, comment on current initiatives, and propose improvements or new ideas to improve the quality of services to youth. Its key role is to ensure a solid, youth perspective on all work done by the Youth Secretariat. Through diversity in ethnicity, culture, geography, age, gender, and socio-economic status, YAP endeavors to provide support to the Youth Secretariat with an ongoing "voice" for Alberta youth, to ensure they are heard in a meaningful and relevant way, on issues that impact their lives.

Some of YAP's work and items of discussion over the past year include:

- Family and domestic violence;
- Crystal methamphetamine and its growing presence among Alberta's youth;
- Transition for youth with developmental disabilities;
- Review of and recommendations on the Career and Life Management (CALM) curriculum;
- Review of the Child Welfare Act;
- Review of the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act;
- Child prostitution;
- Development of a bursary program for youth in government care;
- Discussion of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and teen pregnancy;
- Review of the Youth in Transition Policy Framework;
- Involvement with *Uniting for Children 2003*, Great Kids Award 2003 and the 2003 Youth Forums.

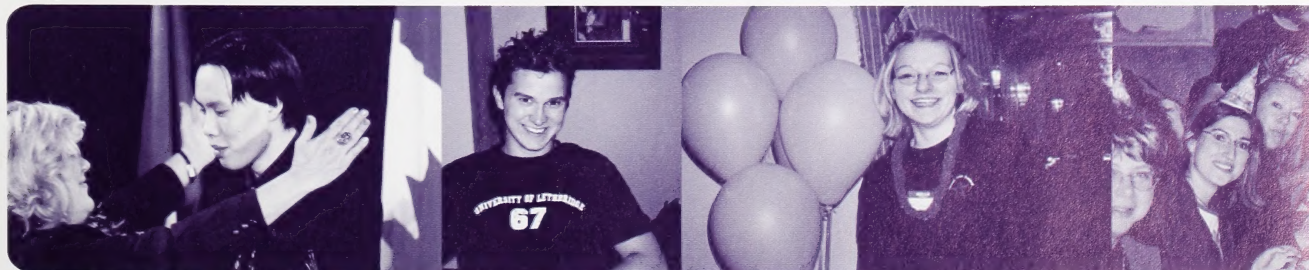


Several of these initiatives are outlined in greater detail in the section to follow. ▲

## Youth Forums

The 2003 Youth Forums took place in February and March 2003. Information from the Children's Forum 2001 and Youth Forums 2002, provided direction for future forums and programs throughout Alberta. The Youth Forums of 2003 involved partnering with community stakeholders and youth to plan and implement a forum for each Children's Services' region. The theme for the 2003 forums was *youth empowerment*, and each region was given the opportunity to define 'empowerment' and issues that are relevant to their community. In the true spirit of empowerment, the regional youth planning committees identified the specific goals and strategies for the forums in their own region. Overall, the forums proved to be an important opportunity for Alberta youth to communicate their thoughts, participate in an ongoing discussion with government, and offer insight into the continual enrichment of Alberta.

The theme of the 2004 Youth Forums is "youth committed to community". Building on last year's objective to empower youth, we are challenging young people to make a proactive commitment to their community. Youth will be supported to initiate regional Youth Forums that will result in the development and implementation of action items that contribute to meaningful youth engagement in their community. ▲





## ▲ Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Youth Strategy

Working with AADAC, other partnering ministries, and key stakeholders, Alberta Children's Services will develop a multi-level FASD prevention and awareness strategy targeting youth that will include the development of a prevention and awareness campaign targeted at youth in Alberta (specifically, youth who are most at risk of having FASD-affected children, including youth in care), that delivers a strong message about the dangers of drinking alcohol while pregnant. Other important initiatives focusing on raising the awareness and education levels of Alberta's youth on the subject of FASD will aim to emphasize the prevention of FASD and help address the misperceptions and lack of public knowledge within this age category surrounding this 100% preventable disorder.

When asked about the current FASD awareness campaigns in Alberta, the Youth Advisory Panel commented that there needs to be an increased focus on targeting the FASD campaign to males, and that the Youth Secretariat must continue working with youth in the development of initiatives that are targeted to young people to ensure the messages being developed are not frightening or stigmatizing, and are relevant to and reflective of the issues and perspectives of today's youth. The Youth Secretariat has been, and will continue to be, consulted on the development and implementation of the FASD Youth Strategy within Alberta. ▲

## ▲ Great Kids Awards

Each year, Alberta Children's Services celebrates the outstanding children and youth of our province who make an exceptional contribution to their school, family and community. Great Kids are children and youth between the ages of 5 and 18 who contribute in a positive way to their schools, communities and families, and can be found in all grades from Kindergarten to Grade 12, in urban and rural areas throughout Alberta.

Since its inception, the Great Kids Award program has enjoyed a successful partnership with the Youth Advisory Panel, as they assist in mentoring the award recipients, hosting the recipients and their families at the award celebration weekend, and assisting with speaking and other important duties at the annual award ceremony. The Great Kids Award 2003 was a tremendous success, as 17 deserving young Albertans were honoured. This year, another group of exceptional young Albertans will be paid tribute at the Great Kids Award 2004. ▲



## ▲ Uniting for Children 2003

*Uniting for Children 2003* allowed more than 1,500 registered delegates to be exposed to new and innovative approaches to service provision in Alberta, to share the developments that have occurred from the recommendations made at the last forum, *Uniting for Children 2001*, and to explore how government ministries are collaborating on initiatives to improve services provided to children, youth and families in Alberta.

The first day of the forum marked an exciting day in our province as Alberta's Promise was officially launched. Alberta's Promise is a provincewide initiative that encourages Albertans to commit to promises that help ensure our young people receive the attention and support they need to succeed. It facilitates the connection of community resources with initiatives that create more opportunities for children and youth to live, learn and play in a safe environment. With an emphasis on mentoring, investing in the lives of young people, and encouraging leadership, innovation, participation and volunteerism in the community, Alberta's Promise is an important vehicle to help our province's youth grow and develop to their potential.

A number of incredibly dedicated youth volunteers lent their time, eagerness and energy, often behind the scenes, to help ensure the success of the Alberta's Promise launch and the *Uniting for Children 2003* forum as a whole. ▲





# ALBERTA ROUNDTABLE ON **FAMILY** VIOLENCE AND BULLYING

## ▲ Family and Domestic Violence

Family and domestic violence happens at home, in school, on the street, and in our communities. It can be related to bullying and gangs, or can involve parents, men, women, seniors, children and youth. It affects us all and it's everybody's business.

Alberta has the second highest level of family and domestic violence incidents in Canada. It is a complex issue that demands innovative, coordinated, comprehensive and enduring solutions, and the active involvement of many systems, institutions, professions and governments.

Honourable Iris Evans, Minister of Children's Services, has been asked to take the lead, on behalf of the province, in hosting the **Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence**

and Bullying, on May 7, 2004. This roundtable will be an important step in our collaborative effort to address the growing concern of family and domestic violence in Alberta, through the development of comprehensive, community-based solutions. Key stakeholders from government, the judiciary, schools, police, service providers, funders, and community partners are being asked to participate in this important discussion.

Family and domestic violence was among the list of discussion items that Youth Secretariat Chair, Mary Anne Jablonski, discussed at the Youth Advisory Panel meeting in November 2003. YAP will also be consulted in the development stages of the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying. ▲

## ▲ Advancing Futures: A Bursary Program for Youth in Government Care

A bursary program for youth in government care has been an issue that has been discussed numerous times, over the past several years, as an important project to assist youth in care in their educational pursuits.

**ADVANCING futures**»»  
A Bursary Program for Youth in Government Care

In response to these discussions, Advancing Futures - A Bursary Program for Youth in Government Care, was recently established to assist those who have been, or continue to be, under the care of Alberta Children's Services, by allowing them to dream, providing them with opportunities, and equipping them with the resources to succeed.

Youth were highly involved in the development of the program through a variety of consultations, including the Youth Advisory Panel and the Calgary and Edmonton Youth in Care Networks. Individuals are invited to apply if they are interested in upgrading their education, earning a degree/diploma from an Alberta post-secondary institution, learning a trade, and/or earning a license or certificate.

The bursary will cover complete tuition, mandatory school fees and books, school-related expenses, and living expenses (as assessed on a case-by-case basis), for the duration of the academic term.

Future program enhancements will include a strong focus on mentoring and other supplementary supports, and all youth will be encouraged to develop support teams to assist them in meeting their educational goals. ▲



# The Year Ahead

In the year ahead, the Youth Secretariat will continue consulting on and partnering with the initiatives already described. Other projects and priorities in the year ahead include:

- ■ Continued support of Calgary and Edmonton Associations for Youth in Care by building stronger ties and working relationships, and by having the Executive Director of both associations represented on the Youth Advisory Panel.
- ■ Continued conversations with agencies serving youth to more clearly identify service gaps and opportunities for at-risk youth in Alberta.
- ■ Participation with other ministries and community stakeholders to develop a broad, integrated response to substance abuse by youth, including crystal methamphetamine - a growing problem in Alberta and other jurisdictions.
- ■ Consultation on the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying.
- ■ Helping to develop an increased youth presence on government websites.
- ■ Developing links to other government youth advisory panels.
- ■ Increased involvement with the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution (PChIP) program.
- ■ Increased focus on:
  - Integration and Coordination
  - Learning and Skill Development
  - Basic Needs

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